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FIRST-YEAR LATIN—A WORKING KNOWLEDGE OF FORMS AND VOCABULARY.¹

IT has come to be recognized that the first year's work in Latin is by far the most important of the course. In this year a great many of the student's habits of study are acquired, and his attitude toward the subject is generally determined. Most of the difficulties peculiar to Latin are encountered by the pupil at this stage of the work, and under circumstances in which he is himself at the greatest possible disadvantage. Difficulties arise from the necessity of dealing with strange words and forms, and with new ideas; from the fact that observations and distinctions must be made to which the pupil's mind is unaccustomed; and, lastly, from the strange combinations of these new words and their various forms to express thoughts.

Of these difficulties the first is the most evident, for the new words and forms are there, and cannot be ignored. That these new words, however, in the majority of cases, also stand for strange ideas, separated from ours by two thousand years, is not quite so evident, and it requires something of an effort on the part of the teacher to appreciate this fact, and its significance to the learner. *Fluvius* is "river" and *equus* is "horse," but what is there in the mind of the average pupil, or his experience, that will correspond, with any degree of exactness, to *murus* or *templum* or *castra*, to *hospes* or *consul*? And yet, ideas like these must be looked upon as easy. They are easily explained, and when once well explained they will generally stand for something like their real meaning with a good portion of the class. In the case of most abstract notions, on the other hand, the teacher's work is much more difficult. For in them it is not merely a question of leading the pupil to a comprehension or recognition of an idea, but usually of forming the idea in his mind from the bottom up. Here, especially, is an opportunity for the teacher to put to use any ability he may have, to draw on

¹ Read at the Classical Conference at Ann Arbor, Mich., March 26; see p. 406.

the blackboard, to act, or to paint with words. Whatever can be done to associate ideas with the words which the pupil is learning, must be done, for here is the first parting of the ways that lead to a living and a lifeless study of the language.

There is one distinction, which could well be made in this connection, namely, between words which, as we say, "have but one meaning," and those which "have many meanings." Those of the latter class might profitably be repeated in the special vocabulary every time they occur in a new meaning, together with all the previous meanings and with back references. Such a practice would help to concentrate attention upon these troublesome individuals, and would gradually result in something like mastery.

Of all the necessary things which our first-year books are at present obliged to crowd out, there is none more essential than just such a constant recurrence of words and constructions previously learned, not once, nor three times, but at frequent intervals, according to their difficulty, throughout the book. To gain the greatest benefit from this repetition, it is important that all words should occur for the first time just as early as possible. Practically all the nouns used in the first year, for example, ought to be in use by the time the declensions are finished, instead of straggling in like lost sheep when other topics are under discussion. I may say that I am assuming here, as I shall throughout the paper, what seems to me the only correct principle, namely, that the learning of a form and the learning of its commonest uses, as well as the learning of a good stock of the words most nearly concerned, should go hand in hand, or at least, that no considerable time should intervene between the learning of the one and of the other.

It may perhaps be said, without much exaggeration, that as a rule we do not fully appreciate the fact that a review is not a necessary evil, but an integral part in the progress of the work, and above all, that it must have aim and system. It should be clearly announced and understood, for instance, that a certain exercise will, among other things, pay special attention to the nouns in *-tas* or *-um*, to the adjectives in *-er*, or the verbs in *-io*,

or to this or that group of constructions. More than that, these adjectives, nouns, and verbs should all be found at the end of the book, classified for reference according to their peculiarities of form, and not, as at present, scattered through a general vocabulary. The presence of this latter, as we now have it at the end of the book, surely does more to discourage a thorough learning of the vocabulary than anything else that could be devised.

The second difficulty which Latin presents to the beginner, is that it requires observations and distinctions to which his mind is entirely unaccustomed. This is a difficulty which it is very easy to underestimate, even when it is known to exist. Boys and girls of fourteen may handle their English fairly well — let us hope they do. Still, for all their ability to express themselves fluently within the range of their customary thoughts and experiences, they have not yet, as a rule, learned to hold this language of theirs at arm's length, and to see, even in a slight degree, just how its various words, phrases, and clauses perform their work. In short, they have not acquired that particular attitude toward their English, which they must have, in order to use it as a means for the acquisition of Latin. This fact becomes painfully evident when they are asked to express, in their own words, some simple set of ideas which involve a given relation, such as precedence in time, means, cause, result.

That these grammatical concepts must be firmly grasped before any safe progress can be made, is clear. It would seem to be equally clear, that they can be most firmly and easily grasped through many and varied illustrations in English. Five English sentences can be given by the class as readily as one sentence can be given in Latin, and as the pupil knows what the English means, the terms of the grammar will by this method soon assume a fulness of significance, which they will probably never reach if they are illustrated only in Latin. It is my firm conviction that the great confusion which often appears in the translation of later years, of the different uses of the Latin cases and moods, is much more than half due to the fact that the student has never acquired more than a very vague, if indeed he has any, notion of their difference in meaning.

When we have in this way given flesh and blood to a grammatical term and clothed it in English, we must next clothe it in Latin. After learning what "with" may mean in English, we proceed to the ablative of accompaniment, cause, manner, and means, in Latin. In other words, while we are learning constructions, and in those lessons which we are devoting mainly to this task, our first exercise is translation from English into Latin, not from Latin into English. It is only in this way that the Latin expression when finally employed can be associated with a full meaning in the pupil's mind, instead of being associated with a single English translation.

I am well aware that the demand for easier first-year books usually takes the form of a demand for shorter English-Latin exercises. Short-sighted as this demand is, we need not be so very much surprised at it, for an English-Latin exercise at the end of a lesson, where our books invariably have it, is an anomaly — as much an anomaly, as if we should end our Latin course at the university with Latin composition. Translation into Latin properly is, and should everywhere be, a means to the end of exact, careful translation from Latin into English. Hence the former exercise should precede the latter, and should be preparatory to it. This does not mean, however, that the English-Latin exercises should be shorter than they are, but merely that they should be different in kind, and adapted to a different purpose.

When, on the other hand, the demand for shorter English-Latin exercises is part and parcel of the demand for interesting stories in the first-year book — in other words, for picnics rather than work — this demand is just as surely suicidal as any demand for continuous picnicking would be under any circumstances. What is perhaps worse, the whole movement for shorter and easier introductory books is a pure and simple confession of ignorance of what does interest boys and girls who have any business to be in the high school. A little reflection upon athletics alone should disabuse our minds of the notion that hard things are in themselves disagreeable. No, it is not the difficulty of Latin, it is the feeling that he is not achieving anything in an independent way, and that he cannot perform the tasks that are

set him without becoming a slave to the notes and the vocabulary, that discourages and disgusts the boy. And it will not, in the nature of the case, be different, until the boy's preparation previous to the exercise has been of such a kind, that the exercise itself can, if necessary, be done in class and at sight. When he has come to feel that he has the strength and equipment to do this, then translation itself will be not only a profit but a pleasure, for it will then be merely a normal functioning in his acquired capacity.

Perhaps there is nothing in all the elementary study of Latin that is harder for an English-speaking boy or girl to thoroughly realize and feel, than the fact that not only the word has a meaning, but that individual parts of the word have a special meaning; that the modifications of tense and mood signs, and of the endings for person, voice, and case, generally make all the difference in the word. It is not only difficult for the beginner to realize the great value of these small modifications, but almost equally difficult even to notice them, in seeing or reading the words. It should be observed particularly, that by far the most easily overlooked of all these word-elements are those which stand hidden away in the middle of the word, such as the tense and mood signs, for instance. It is these latter elements, therefore, which must, more than all the rest of the word, be treated in a manner to attract the pupil's attention to them in a very special way.

Much improvement has been made along this line lately in first-year books, by showing how the forms of the verb, for example, are built up. For a really useful knowledge of the forms consists, in the first instance, precisely in a well-acquired habit of observing all the parts of the word and associating each with a meaning or a function: *Clama-* "shout," *-ba-* "it was continued or repeated," *-nt* "it was they." If some such method of analysis is employed insistently and judiciously, we may surely hope that the numerous and irritating cases of oversight in tense, voice, and mood, as well as in case and degree of comparison, will be somewhat lessened. When the student has been carefully trained to observe all the elements of the word,

he needs only to have the mistranslated word or expression distinctly pronounced to him to realize his mistake. The gain is, that he is put in a way to correct the mistake himself, without the constant necessity of such enslaving questions as "What is the tense of *dixerant*?" "Then how should you translate it?"

It is a working knowledge of forms that we need. And to obtain it we must aim from the start to inculcate only those ways of regarding the forms that will be directly helpful in the work for which we acquire them, namely, the translating of English into Latin and of Latin into English. It needs to be made very plain that the learning of forms by rote, *amō, amás, amáit*, or even *ámo, ámas, ámat*, is one of the most stupid and harmful practices in which a teacher can have his pupils engage. How the habit thus acquired can help a boy to see in what way *amabis* means anything different from *amabaris*, or *amaverunt* than *amamini*, except it be when the habit is overcome and forgotten, it is hard to see. Perhaps you will say that the boy learns his forms more easily in a fixed order. Certainly he does, but of what good is it when he has learned them in a fixed order? Surely it serves no purpose except to facilitate their rehearsal in the selfsame way. For the only thing which a form learned after this fashion can call to the learner's mind, is the next form in order, and if this piece of associative memory can help him anywhere in his work, that place remains to be pointed out.

Far better, and really useful in their way, though they fail to take into account the peculiar elusiveness of those elements of the word which do not readily attract the attention, are the two methods of drill on forms suggested by Professor Bennett on pp. 60 and 61 of *The Teaching of Latin and Greek*. I quote in part:

The teacher can give the meaning and ask for the corresponding form, or he may give the form and ask for the meaning; or he may state the mood, tense, person, and number in which a given form is found and ask the pupils to give the form; or, lastly, he may give the form and ask the pupils to locate its mood, tense, number, and person.

These two kinds of drill, by meaning and by location in paradigm, are both useful and necessary, the latter as a stepping-stone to the former, and as an ultimate definition of the form, to

whose fixed terms the pupil may at any time return to take his bearings anew. But useful as these things are, we are not in doing them really doing the work of Latin. We are only making the first preparation for it. And perhaps it will seem strange to those who are accustomed to insist on thoroughness, if I say that it is quite possible to do too much of this kind of preparation, to engage in one or the other kind of drill too exclusively, and, above all, to continue one or both too long. Next to the student who constantly overlooks some essential part of the word, is surely the one who can, after conscientious preparation, not go beyond the point of giving the case, or the person and number, and doing it out loud at that, whenever he is asked to proceed. And a close third is certainly that other student who can translate each word well enough, but with the utmost effort finds himself unable to make the sentence hang together or move along. These two cases are both products, or shall we say by-products, of the training just described, which is thorough and good so far as it goes, but does not advance beyond the preliminary steps to the work itself.

A working knowledge is not a knowledge of forms or about them, though it presupposes both, but it is the ability to handle forms in certain connections and for certain purposes. The acquisition of this knowledge necessarily involves the use of the forms in complete discourse, and it is only to be gained by long and assiduous practice in the comparison and repetition of entire constructions. It does not mean that we can learn the use of half a conjugation in ten sentences and such odd examples as may occur to the maker of the book later on, but it means thirty or forty examples today, and more tomorrow, and next week, and next month.

But, you say, where is the time? I acknowledge the burden of proof, and shall allow myself the liberty of making two suggestions. In the first place, it should be our aim to form and impress sound habits of translation from the very first occurrence of a form and its use; and this should be done, just as far as it is possible, in the class-room and under the teacher's eye. I am surely right when I say that the number of wrong habits that are

formed and fixed, and the amount of valuable time that is lost in aimless experimentation by the young pupil left to himself without guidance, form the basis of a most serious charge against our current methods of teaching.

Set translation exercises for home preparation should not be too numerous, and should in the main be assigned for the general review of words and constructions that have on previous occasions been thoroughly worked over in the class. The time thus gained should be used for intensive oral drill upon the constructions and words of the lesson in hand and the lessons immediately preceding, or of some special topic for review. If the assignment has been definite, and the teacher has prepared himself for the lesson, thirty sentences or more can easily be gone over in half an hour. Now in this oral drill it should be understood that it is not necessary to handle all the Latin for the whole English sentence. But the English sentence itself should always be a whole, for this the pupils understand, and in it they can readily see the relation of parts. Let me illustrate. If the cases are being studied, the teacher may give English as follows: "The boys struck the gate with big stones," "We cannot trust them for one hour," "They wept with joy," "They will journey from France to Rome;" and he will expect a translation only for the words and phrases which involve the use of a case. Then the teacher may give similar phrases in Latin, *Per medium urbem, omnibus copiis, paucis diebus post*, and ask the pupils to give for each a full English sentence involving a translation of it. The same method can be employed in every part of the work, in direct discourse, participles, pronouns, subordinate clauses—only those parts being fully given in Latin, to which the attention of the class is to be directed.

This drill has several advantages over the translation of full sentences. First, the attention is concentrated upon the new words and constructions; second, a much clearer idea is gained of the relation of things from an English sentence than from a Latin sentence, and particularly from many English sentences than from a few in Latin; third, the much greater number of sentences that can be treated, will strengthen and deepen the

impression, besides giving every member of the class a full chance; and lastly, the pupil is compelled to do the work in class, which insures both honesty and alertness on his part, and gives the teacher a chance to nip wrong habits in the bud, or to correct them before they become fixed. The whole exercise will be found to increase greatly the pupil's confidence in himself, and so also his pleasure in all the work that follows. To be sure, in itself this drill is not enough. It is in the strictest sense preparatory, and must be supplemented at intervals by sets of sentences for more extended review, which are to be studied beforehand and translated in full.

The second way in which the question of time can be met, involves a consideration without which, in my opinion, no discussion of the first year's work can any longer be complete. Our first-year books at present are neither here nor there. They aim to cover all the necessary forms and constructions preparatory to reading, but no one will claim that these points are covered thoroughly, or in any way finally. The fact that we go over the whole ground again later in the composition, is evidence enough of this. Besides, there are at present some very necessary things that must be left out entirely, or must be presented very briefly and unsatisfactorily. I need only mention adverbs, pronouns, participles, word-order, and word-formation.

There would seem to be but one satisfactory solution of the problem, namely, to cover less ground the first year, and to do it more thoroughly, and then to continue the work of the first year on through the second year, mainly as composition work. In other words, the work of the first year and the composition and grammar work of the second year should be a unit. This plan would make it possible to postpone the systematic treatment of difficult matters, like the subjunctive, until the pupil has gained strength and confidence in what precedes. The whole vocabulary in the second year might well be taken from the *Gallic War*, which could be read two times a week in the beginning, and three or four times a week later. Even if we should have to forego twenty or thirty chapters of our four books of Cæsar, the gain in thoroughness and in confidence on the pupil's part would be compensation twentyfold.

This extension of the beginner's book would also have another important result. At present the immature pupil, with his vague notions of form and construction, made vaguer still by his first summer vacation, finds himself, in his second year, suddenly referred to the grammar for everything that had previously been carefully adapted to his needs in the beginner's book. Now grammars are excellent in their way, but they cannot in the nature of the case give their statement of principles in a way which takes into account the pupil's stage of progress at any particular time. Besides, they state the same principles in different words from those used in the beginner's book, and frequently do not make the same subdivisions and distinctions, to say nothing of positive disagreements of opinion. Could not this transfer to the grammar be better made when the pupil has grown another year and his knowledge is clearer and more definite? Two years are none too long to cover all the more elementary facts and principles of Latin grammar thoroughly, and to gain a working knowledge of them. And if proper grading and careful consideration for the pupil's stage of progress bears fruit elsewhere, why should it not do so in Latin?

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